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The Wealth *of the* Spirit

By

JAMES WILLIS GLEED

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In the Heart of the Green Mountains

The Wealth *of the* Spirit

By

JAMES WILLIS GLEED

A True Story of a Transplanted New England Mother, As Told by a Grateful Son to a Class of Young Women at Graduation

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INTRODUCTION

IT IS at the request of Mr. Gleed's many friends that I have undertaken to publish this little story, "The Wealth of the Spirit," in book form.

For a number of years, those who have read the manuscript have found in it not only a beautiful story, beautifully told, but a source of inspiration as well.

I feel, therefore, that the book should find a ready welcome among those readers who are outside of Mr. Gleed's immediate circle of friends.

—W. J. O'C.

His lesser gems the lapidary sets
  In cunning marvels of the goldsmith's art,
    Whose fretted bars and filagrees impart
An added brilliance to the starry jets;
But the great balls of diamond fire he lets
  Into plain circlets whence contrasted dart
    Their lambent glories, dazzling in such sort
That the rapt sight the setting clean forgets.
God put the luminous soul of her who passed
  Into that frail and anguish-stricken frame,
    That its supernal splendor might contrast
With its sad setting, till the living flame
  Burned the slight dross away, and at the last
    Transfigured to the Master's crown she
      came.

—*W. H. Carruth.*

FOREWORD.

IT is said that he who has really and fully comprehended a single flower of the field has comprehended the universe of nature. And this is true. For before a man can really and fully comprehend a flower he must know its origin, the laws and processes of its growth and decay, and its relations to the rest of the animate and inanimate world. He must know its relations to the inanimate world; which involves an understanding of geology and paleontology and chemistry and physics. He must perceive its real standing in the animate world; which involves all that learning which is included under the word biology. He must know its position in the vegetable kingdom; which means a complete knowledge of botany.

He must know its relation to man, its utility, its place in history, in poetry and in art; and this involves the evolution of civilized life from its earliest beginnings,—the whole authentic history of man from the earliest dawn of consciousness, wherever and however ascertained; whether from rocks, tools, weapons, buildings, books, institutions, customs, laws, arts, religions; or from our own impulses, feelings and inner consciousness. And when, in our pursuit of a real comprehension of this one tiny object in the natural world, we have traversed the whole domain of fixed material facts and certain earthly experience, we are at last irresistibly swept out into the

sea of psychology, and up into the infinite blue ether of religion, to the very throne of the Maker and Preserver of all.

It is sometimes said that thinkers of ancient days began at the wrong end of the puzzle; that it was their foolish custom to lie supinely upon their backs and spin wide, vague concepts of Deity and Nature and principles and laws out of their own inner consciousness; and then to arrange, classify and explain all visible, audible, perceptible phenomena under the arbitrary and often fanciful principles and concepts thus evolved. In other words, they proceeded from the abstract to the concrete, from God to the flower. Whereas, now we begin with the flower and travel cautiously and humbly upward and outward to the discovery of rules, laws and principles, and then still more cautiously and tentatively upward and onward into the regions of philosophy and theology and religion, where the thinkers of ancient days so rashly began.

The life of every human being is divided into certain distinct periods or epochs; and each period or epoch is marked and limited by a certain all-important day—which day always stands out like a milestone or signal-light in the memory of that person and his friends. With you this is one of those days. You are about to enter upon the toils and responsibilities, the joys and sorrows, the triumphs and disappointments of what we call real life; and I should be glad indeed if I could say something on this occasion which would not be wholly forgotten tomorrow or next day, but would prove of real

service to you in the years that are to come. But this is a difficult thing to do.

I have lived some twenty years out of school. In that time I have read and observed and worked; I have had my measure of joy and sorrow, success and failure. This experience has, of course, crystallized itself into certain convictions and beliefs which constitute my creed of life. These rules and principles which I have discovered or think I have discovered,—these general deductions from my own experience,—I might give you tonight in a set and formal speech, with argument and illustration and maybe some ornament of oratory; and this would be the usual form of school address. It might be of some use to you, and it might not. You might remember a little of it tomorrow, and you might not. But this I have decided not to do. Instead of principles and precepts, deductions and conclusions,—certain to be more or less faulty,—I am going to give you a little chapter out of my own experience; instead of the abstract, the concrete; instead of the ancient way, the modern; instead of the universal, the particular; instead of generalities about human life, one human life; instead of science, a flower.

Instead of making you a speech, I am going to tell you a story—the story of a girl. It all comes to the same thing, I suppose, in the end. Every true story reveals true philosophy, and all true philosophy is but the essence of true stories.

If I can tell you this story truly and simply and honestly and as it ought to be told, I am sure it will be of more value to you in the years that are to come than many speeches.

I.

AWAY up in northern Vermont, in the heart of the Green Mountains, in the narrowest little valley, shut in by the closest, steepest, highest, greenest hills your imagination can picture, this girl was born, in the year 1828. A clear stream comes down from the mountains with a roar, but hushes like an urchin entering church when it gets to the bottom of the valley and winds through the gray little hamlet. To get into this village or out of it, you must, in all directions but one, climb or descend long steep hills. The east hill stands in the light of the west hill a good part of the morning, and the west hill takes its revenge on the east hill a good part of the afternoon; so that between the two hills the village is permanently associated in my mind with mist and twilight and great stretches of shadow on the green uplands of summer and the white snowfields of winter.

Here this girl was born, in 1828, and here her childhood and early womanhood were spent. She was the first child of the family that survived babyhood. After her came six others in the following fourteen years. Her father kept the village store, and was deacon in the church. He was one of a long line of deacons reaching back into the very early Massachussets' history —the era of Puritanism.

New England was still Puritan in those years. There was still practically but one church, the

free, puritan democratic congregational church. This was especially true in Vermont. Religion was a very real thing; a tremendous, controlling, moulding, shaping power. The creed was stern; the requirements strict. Heaven and Hell were very real and certain—especially Hell. The people believed, I suppose, that God was a loving God; but they *thought* of Him most as a stern and righteous Judge. Satan was an actual person, and very busy in every religious family.

Economic conditions were extremely hard. The market was remote; the merchant went all the way to Boston twice a year by wagon to buy and sell goods. The climate was severe; severer then than now; and they describe it to this day as nine months of winter and three months of very late fall. Literature is full of descriptions of the old-fashioned New England winter; but from books no one can get any real feeling of its interminable duration. *White* was the normal color of the earth, according to my infant impressions. But at intervals—after vast stretches of time—cycles and eons as it appeared to me—there would come a change in the atmosphere; dark objects began to dot the surface of the snow, first the tops of fence-posts, then the top rails, and gradually other things; every roadside was a rushing brook; strange things began to happen to the maple trees; presently a spot of green grass put in appearance; and finally the landscape lost its normal look entirely and a new world stood revealed, full of strange but faintly familiar objects, which I studied with

interest and wondered where I had seen them before. This was Vermont within my memory; it seems to grow more wintry as you go back.

The summers were and are most beautiful, but oh! how far from what we would call productive. All of the country is side-hill that is not mountain-top. Ages of wash have not put enough real soil into the narrow valleys ever to make it muddy. Kansas, boys and girls, would laugh at what the farmers call their fields and their crops. The natural conditions are all as crabbed and ungenerous as they well could be. And yet mankind has maintained itself here and grown rich and comfortable. It has only been, however, by the most untiring industry and the most relentless and uncompromising economy.

Those were primitive times; conditions were harder then than now. It was a heavily-wooded country; every farm had to be cleared,—once of the forest, and perennially of stumps and stones. (Trees, grass, brook trout and black bears grew well and spontaneously. Dwellers on the easy prairies of the West often say that Vermont ought to have been fenced, and left for a National Park.) All natural conditions were adverse; but the people were heroic.

Into such conditions this girl was born, away back in 1828. Not so long ago, measuring by mere years; yet a very long time ago, indeed, measuring by manners and customs, and material conveniences and comforts. It was not only before railroad and telephone and telegraph and electric light and steam heat,—it was before coal oil, before cook-stoves, before matches. It

was the time of flint-and-tinder, and tallow-dips, and wide fireplaces. Girls were taught to sew and knit and spin and weave in those days. They went three times to church on the Sabbath, and listened to sermons hours long in cold churches. They read the Bible and Baxter's Saint's Rest; and Pilgrim's Progress for light literature. On week-days they attended the district school and helped at home, and had much to do and little to wear.

Spelling-schools and singing-schools and coasting, skating and sleighing, were the amusements. Once a year came the traveling shoemaker, and all the little feet were shod; once for a year,—no more shoes for twelve months! How did they do it, fathers and mothers? Once a year came the traveling tailoress, and made suits for the boys and hats for the girls,—and no more hats or suits for that year. Once a year came pig-killing time, and fresh meat and vast numbers of mince pies and other indigestible compounds, enough for six months' consumption,—were stored away in nature's refrigerator. There were no ice bills in the good old days.

II.

SUCH, dimly hinted, was the outside child-life of this girl. As to appearance, she is described to me as suggesting a shy little brown bird. She was small and delicate, and on the whole not pretty; but she had beautiful great brown eyes and dark silken hair, very long and abundant. She grew up religious, thoughtful, sensitive and reserved; but she had the keenest sense of humor and a fine dry wit which helped her through many a sore strait in after years. She liked beautiful things, including beautiful dress; and to tell the whole truth, enjoyed arranging her hair in becoming fashion and putting on her best attire and looking just right—as all girls should.

Cares and responsibilities came early. She finished the district school at thirteen and herself became a teacher in a neighboring district at a dollar a month and "board round." She was still in short dresses and pantalets, but she was able to manage grown-up scholars without difficulty, and her services were entirely satisfactory to the committee. She early had to assume many of the duties of an invalid mother not only at home but outside. When neighbors were sick, neighbors helped nurse. If death came, the neighbors prepared the body for burial, and, according to the custom at that time, "sat up with the corpse." At fourteen she was performing these duties as substitute for her mother

—a rather solemn ceremonial for a child of fourteen.

After a year of teaching she was away at an academy for several terms, where she learned a little painting and a little French, and what else I do not know; but this I do know, that before her life was ended she managed in one way and another to learn a great deal.

School days over, she came back to take charge of the whole family, from the little new baby-brother up to the invalid mother and the hard-worked, over-burdened father. And so she passed out of childhood into girlhood and from girlhood into womanhood. The picture of her early years as I have drawn it seems serious enough—if not positively melancholy. Yet to hear her tell of it you would think the days of her youth were most happy and joyous, and I know she really felt them to have been so.

Perhaps they *were* happy; and perhaps their happiness was in a considerable measure due to a lad named Thomas. She had grown up with this Thomas, who is described as a bright generous, rather harum-scarum boy, the son of the minister, and as full of mischief as the law allows or public opinion requires a minister's son to be. When one Sunday the minister pulled out his handkerchief and scattered a deck of cards all over the pulpit, he merely looked over his glasses and remarked, "My son Tom has been at his tricks again." That was all he said—then—and went on with his sermon.

She and Tom were in the district school together and at the academy together, and that is one of the best things about co-education; it

makes good matches. I never knew it to fail. She didn't wholly approve of his ways, but he did of hers; and I fancy she thought in her innermost heart that she was better fitted to correct his faults than any other of the girls in that neighborhood; besides all which, she loved him with a whole heart,—and he her. And so, when he had committed the Constitution of the United States to heart and been admitted to the bar and acquired a copy of the statutes and an office table and a few articles of household furniture; when he was twenty-four and she was twenty-two, they were married. And this happened two years after her first great sorrow—the death of her mother.

And now ensue eleven easy, prosperous years, full of useful activity, and full also of happiness save for her second great sorrow, the death of her first-born. Three other children came, and with them came a reasonable business success to take care of them. While this young husband would not go three times a day to church on Sunday, he proved to be a good man on Monday and all the other days of the week; he was kind and generous and appreciative; she could be modestly proud of his achievements in law and in politics; he was generally beloved in the larger community to which they had removed; and so their friendship and unity grew with each passing year,—and the world was bright.

Then came Sixty-one and the call to arms. Thomas, an ardent hater of slavery from his childhood, determined to enlist. To this end he plunged into the work of closing up his affairs; accomplished in a month or two what

should have taken six; fell ill in consequence, and died after a brief illness. He had many real mourners for a time, and one for a lifetime. The blow was sudden and awful; it affected her health; she never really recovered from it; her grief lasted always; but it did not destroy her, or paralyze her energies.

Two or three years later came a fourth great sorrow, the death of her youngest child.

Her husband had left her a comfortable little fortune—if you count a large package of notes given him by fair-weather friends and dependent unfortunates. These out,—and they proved worthless,—she had about three thousand dollars to start with. This was melting. Her lungs were affected, and the doctors eventually advised a change of climate.

III.

AND so in May, 1866, she said good-by to her old home, her old friends, all the associations of childhood, girlhood and womanhood, to the graves of her parents, her husband and baby-boys, and with her two surviving children set boldly and courageously forth into the great new West, and at the end of five days of travel landed in Lawrence, Kan., and there settled.

Half of her little fortune—now reduced to two thousand dollars—was misapplied and lost. With the rest she bought a home. This home consisted of a small one-story house, sixteen feet by twenty-four, without cellar or attic. It was not much like the home she left. It was built of native lumber throughout, the siding being of black walnut, then very abundant and cheap. All this lumber warped. The house had three rooms in it; one twelve by sixteen and two twelve by eight each. It stood on a piece of ground seventy-five by two hundred and ten feet—all of it tillable, as I soon found to my sorrow. And in this home she began a hand-to-hand struggle with poverty.

Let us realize her position. A tender, delicate, shrinking woman,—but for this little home, practically penniless,—with two children dependent upon her for education and support, has been transplanted from the cool, clean, windless, dustless, mudless, blooming and picturesque moun-

tains of Vermont to the flat, hot, windy, dusty, muddy prairies of Kansas, among strangers and aliens. The town is raw and new and unfinished. There is scarcely a tree in sight. All the surroundings are bare and ugly and forlorn. She doesn't know how long she can live, nor what will become of her children if she die. The husband of her youth and two dear children lie buried sixteen hundred miles away; and in a sense there also lie buried her own heart and hopes and life. She suffers in body; she has hemorrhages of the lungs, and a deep hacking cough which is never to leave her in all the years that are to come.

What, under these circumstances, would you have said, you great strong, robust, prosperous Lord of Creation? What would you have said, you healthy, happy, cherished, protected woman? Do you frown and groan and complain over the ordinary inconveniences and disappointments of life now? Do you ever pity yourself, and upbraid society, and accuse Providence, and wail that life is not worth living? What would be your attitude toward God and men if you found yourself in *her* condition? Would you have held out? Would your courage have sufficed? Or would you have gone begging for help and sympathy? Or would you have said, "God is a myth, the world is cruel and wicked—let me die?"

What she said was: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want;"— and it was so.

Well, then, what did she do? She had that lot fenced up and plowed, and set those boys to investigating the agricultural resources of Kan-

sas. It is astonishing what quantities of food two boys can raise on half an acre of good Kansas land, and how much mischief they can be kept out of while they are doing it. Add a cow and some chickens, and a good part of the family living is provided for. But I shall always maintain that milking is not a pleasant pastime in summer.

She put her boys into church, Sunday school, and the public schools, and kept them there when they were able to go.

In the spacious mansion I have described she kept a boarder. For ten long years she fought her fight. She did needle-work, canvassed for books, conducted a little school, kept boarders, contrived, saved, patched and pushed on. Her fortune never stood still. She pushed on. Small improvements came. Trees grew. A little cellar was contrived. After a while a "lean-to" was accomplished—ten by sixteen, divided into a kitchen, ten by ten; a bed-room, ten by six. It cost almost nothing, and was not very well built. It never rose to the dignity of plaster, and the snow would sift in here and there; but it was a great convenience and relief and a great financial triumph. She came from a country of soft water, no dust, and exquisite housekeeping. In all those years of patient endurance and persistent, cheerful struggle, she never complained or rebelled or reproached her fate over anything; but if there *was* any complaint or any rebellion, it was over dust and hard water. A cistern she never attained till the fight was practically over, but the well-bucket was finally succeeded by a pump.

IV.

DURING this period she had much sickness to contend with. Two or three years after the start was made her eldest son was taken seriously ill, was confined to his bed for more than a year, received improper medical care, got about on crutches for four or five years, and was left permanently crippled. Two or three times during ten years she herself came near to death's door from pneumonia,—but she had work to do, and she would live. Chills and fever were abroad in those days, and all the family suffered more or less. There were many other minor ailments. Of course, there was no money for doctors; she attended to these troubles herself, and grew quite expert in the theory and practice of medicine, giving a great deal of aid in that way to poorer neighbors.

She never seemed to discover that anybody was *better* off than she; but she was sure many were worse off, and she helped. She had at one time and another quite a variety of neighbors. She was good to them all, and nearly all were good to her. There were three Swede families and two Irish families, a clerk, some mechanics, and some common laborers and a good old colored auntie; and after a while a miller and an engineer and a Jewish clothier. She took a real interest in the welfare of all, and knew when any of them had sickness, and was a sort of mother to all of the children and adviser to all

the mothers. If any of these children needed medicine or correction, she knew it. If any of these men came home drunk, or neglected their families, or failed to send their children to school or church, they were very apt to have a conversation with her; and it was never the last conversation, because they all liked her.

She always had something *to spare.* The children could always take at least a copper cent to Sunday school. She remembered everybody at Christmas time with some little work of her hands. She never complained. She was always cheerful. She had grief and trouble still deeper than anything I may here set down, yet people came to her for sympathy; she never went to others. She was interested in almost everybody about her, but always more interested in those she could help than those who could help her. Indeed, she never seemed to need help, though help came in many kindly, thoughtful ways. If she had nothing, she spent nothing. She loved beautiful things, but never seemed conscious of the lack of them. She appreciated all kinds of material comforts, but was wholly above them. She was always above "things,"—always the regal mistress of circumstances.

Her door was always open; anybody could stay at her house as long as he appeared to need shelter. She could entertain on a crust of bread; and the company would rise from the table with the impression that they had feasted and that basketfuls of fragments remained. Then, and afterward when the stress was over, she helped everybody with whom she came in

contact, and she did it in the wisest way. If she had nothing to give the washerwoman, she could at any rate teach her how to "manage;" if she could not subscribe for the woman canvasser's book, she could at any rate kindly suggest that the woman canvasser would be more successful if her shoes were neater and her gloves mended. She could always give good advice without offense, and get it gratefully accepted and acted upon, because her heart was warm and her interest real.

She was, I suppose, what we call poor; but she never seemed to know it. *Before her sublime trust in God, indomitable courage, and clear, just comprehension of life and its problems, poverty and misfortune were simply helpless.* She was mistress. Her life had always something to spare. She was always able to be a benefactor.

She looked up to no human creature nor down on any. She looked straight at them, and measured them all with one measure. She took no account of the accidents and furniture of men's lives; of fortune or station, or even talent and education; She looked through all these things to the heart and character. The question never was, What property has this person, what position, what talent, or what culture?—but, What is the fundamental character, what is the innermost heart? And with high and low and rich and poor, learned and ignorant, her query was not, What can this person do for me?—but, Can I do anything for her or him?

During all this period she was giving the attention of a mother to her surviving brothers, whose lines had not fallen in pleasant places. To

them she was a loving, sympathetic, persevering, moral and religious monitor; a perpetual fountain of courage and hope; a never-failing friend. Whether near her or at a distance, whether in prosperity or in trouble, she was always with them; they knew her heart was theirs.

Carefully as she looked after the health and strength of her children, still more carefully and painfully and even sternly did she watch their minds and cherish their souls. She held them to their tasks; she infused into them something of her own indomitable courage and independence; she taught them that there was nothing in the world to be ashamed of but evil conduct; nothing to be proud of but good. She was unselfish enough to inflict pain upon them when she deemed it necessary; she never overlooked their faults; she rebuked and corrected them as long as she lived; she kept them cheerful and happy. They had to work, they had to wear patches; they had no money to spend; but such was this mother's marvelous wisdom that until these children grew up to manhood and were as well launched in life as money could have launched them, they never even dreamed that they were poor,—and, in fact, they were not.

The curse of poverty is not the lack of money; it is not hardship and deprivation. If a boy has no overcoat and is compelled to run a mile to school in the winter to keep the cold from reaching his very marrow, what of it? The exercise does him good. If a girl can't go into society because she has to work, or because she has no money for dress, what of it? She will never know how many silly flirtations, worthless

lovers and tragic marriages she had luckily escaped. God knows best. Every added pleasure or comfort, every newly acquired dollar, or place, or power, or influence which God puts into the life of a man or woman, brings a new and added danger and responsibility which may in no wise be escaped; and the temptation and danger of the ballroom is greater than that of the schoolroom or the shop. No, the curse of poverty is not deprivation or hardship. Deprivation is better from all points of view than gratification. The ship-boy sleeps; the king is wakeful. My heroine got joy out of her cellar and "lean-to;" many a woman gets only misery out of her yacht, not the fastest; or her equipage or mansion, not the "latest." Deprivation is nothing. *The curse of poverty and its sole curse is loss of self-respect, loss of right views of life and of men.* So, in reality, this family was never poor.

But let us return to the narrative. Little by little all the storms abated; one by one her cares fell from her. Gradually came on a period of comparative ease, when she had time to read, time to paint, time for pleasant society, time for the woman's literary club; time to do good in new directions. She was a strong and good influence in the lives of many young men in and out of the university. It seems that no one who met her, even casually, ever forgot her. She lived to see her children established in business and happily married; to feel that with God's grace they were destined to live decent, upright, reasonably useful lives,—which was all she asked. She lived to know that she had herself been a

healing and a benediction to many. In spite of poverty, disappointment, trials and disease, she *lived* till every task was done, and then gladly and eagerly she set forth on the long voyage, saying to her sons as the parting came: "I do not know the future, but this I know: It will be all right—all right."

V.

DO you dislike my story? Does it seem lacking in poetry, in beauty, in romance? Do you resent these details, and call them bare, ugly, painful, and depressing, too real and tragic to bear telling? On the contrary, it seems to me that a more beautiful life was never lived; that greater triumph was never won. *All* men, *all* women, of course endure what they cannot escape. *She* assumed the sorrows and burdens and sins of others. All men endure what they cannot escape; yet some lives are full of glory and magnificence and triumph, and others are only pitiful. What makes the difference? The difference lies wholly and solely in the spirit with which the accidents and incidents of life—its joys and sorrows, its so-called good fortune and ill—are met and treated. A life of sorrow and poverty and disappointment which simply grows steadily more bitter, selfish and self-centered, is unhappy and pitiful. A life of ease and luxury and place and power, which grows steadily more selfish and self-centered, is unhappy and pitiful. But that life which grows broader and sweeter and more unselfish with each passing year, come good fortune or come ill,—that is the happy life and the life full of glory, magnificence and triumph. Such a life may yours be.

If this story leaves a painful impression upon you because of the pain and suffering which it contained, then it has not been properly told.

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Her face in repose was very sad; you would know she had seen sorrow—and conquered it; but her smile was a radiant burst of sunshine. The happiness she had was of that deeper sort that Carlyle calls blessedness—a higher and sublimated form of happiness. People liked to be with her. She never depressed; she always uplifted; she had resources; she had intellectual grasp; she had read; she had observed; she was keen, quick, witty, brilliant at times, but she had no malice. Pleasures of the intellect were hers in abundance, but the real source and fountain of the deep gladness she had and the joy she gave, was that large, sweet, noble, trusting heart. You are not to think she had no happiness; her life was full of it. Nobody ever thought of her as unhappy, but as an unfailing source of happiness. Her struggles were not allowed to crush her; they made her large; they gave her sweep and range and depth and dignity and worth. No one so gentle, sweet and winning as she; yet no one so strong, clear-sighted, and fearlessly true. No one so able to read and reach the hearts of all, whether happy or sorrowful, young or old, high or low.

Looking back over her life, you will observe that obstacles were opportunities; weakness was strength, and sorrow joy. Stand off at a little distance and look at men's lives. The lives of all the selfish and self-centered, whether great or small, successful or unsuccessful, melt into a dead-level of monotony. Each pursues his own pleasure and his own aims with such ability as in him is; swine do the same. Swinish lives are always pitiful; many such lives are lived by

both men and women. That life is merely swinish which seeks only its own ease, its own comfort, its own advancement, its own power, or even its own enlightenment and culture. No such life is beautiful or interesting. The beautiful, the interesting, the picturesque and the worthy and noble lives are those such as I have described,—and there are many of them; and the keynote of all such lives I give you in a motto of two sentences of two words each: "Trust God. Do good."

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